

# Punctuation and Usage Part Two

(COM 3223)

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## About this Course

*In this course, you will...*

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- Identify adjectives/adverbs
- Identify modifiers
- Identify proper use of commas
- Describe rules for double negatives
- Describe parallel construction



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### Introduction

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Want to know the exact length of 36 inches? It's quite easy—just grab a yardstick. In fact, any two yardsticks should measure exactly the same. What about language and grammar? What's the measuring rod for what's right and what's wrong? There are dictionaries and writing guides, but they do not always agree like two yardsticks.

Which should be trusted when the texts differ?



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## Acceptable Versus Correct

Language constantly changes as new words enter our vocabularies (for instance, "email" became part of our vocabularies with the introduction of the Internet).

In addition, the rules for constructing sentences change over time. For example, at one time we were told never to end a sentence with a preposition. That rule, while still preferable, has a new flexibility if ending a sentence with a preposition makes the sentence easier to read. So, unlike the absolute rules that govern mathematics, the rules of using language are not always absolute and there is no single authority that establishes grammatical rules.

However, there are accepted norms that we should follow in the workplace. The conventions of punctuation and usage covered in this course are broadly known as acceptable and preferred forms of grammar.



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## Adjectives/Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are defined as words that modify other words. "Modify" means to make the meaning of the word more definite.

Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns in the following ways:

- Adjectives describe: *A tall boy; the black car.*
- Adjectives specify: *that man.*
- Adjectives tell how many: *several parents; 12 children.*

Adjectives typically come before the words they modify, but sometimes writers place descriptive adjectives after the words they modify: *The stallion, long and lean, took the lead.*





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## Adjectives/Adverbs (continued)

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs and other groups of words, such as clauses. While adjectives usually describe characteristics of nouns, adverbs can tell how, when, where, why, how often and how much.

He writes **correctly**. [How]

He volunteered **yesterday**. [When]

He works **outdoors**. [Where]

He arrives **punctually** in order to please his boss. [Why]

He **frequently** works overtime. [How often]

He **consistently** works on Saturdays. [How much]



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## Adjectives/Adverbs (continued)

You can also think of adverbs in the following ways:

Adverbs of time [when/how often]: **tomorrow**, **sometimes**, **often**

Adverbs of place [where]: **there**, **outside**, **indoors**

Adverbs of manner [how]: **gently**, **gracefully**, **correctly**

Adverbs of degree [how much]: **entirely**, **scarcely**, **generally**



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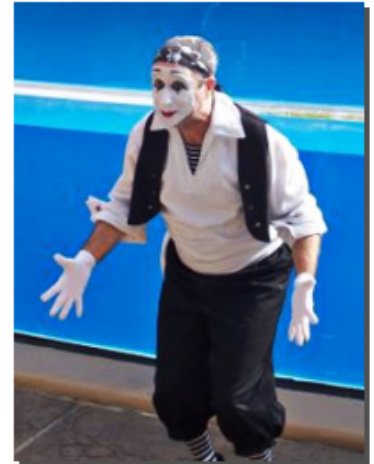
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## Adding -ly to the End

You probably noticed on the preceding page that many adverbs are formed by adding -ly to the end of an adjective.

The **awful** actors performed. [Adjective]  
The play was performed **awfully**. [Adverb]

The **quick** fox jumped. [Adjective]  
The fox jumped **quickly**. [Adverb]



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## Classifying Adjectives and Adverbs

Knowing that adjectives modify nouns and pronouns and adverbs modify all other words, see if you can classify the words below. With your mouse, drag the highlighted words into the appropriate column and click the answer key.

When the **large** bell  
rings **twice**, **smart**  
residents will leave  
**quickly**.

adjective

adverb

adjective 1

adverb 1

adjective 2

adverb 2

Check  
Answers



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## Good and Well

A common error is the misuse of "good" and "well." If you are modifying a noun, use "good." If you are modifying a verb, use "well."

**I have a good car.** "Good" is an adjective modifying a noun ("car").

**My car drives well.** "Well" is an adverb describing how the verb performs ("drives").

**A good man.** [Adjective]

**He dressed well.** [Adverb]

**The good dog.** [Adjective]

**It ran well.** [Adverb]



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## Good and Well (continued)

One instance in which the roles of good and well can become clouded is a sentence constructed with a linking verb. (Linking verbs express a state of being or condition rather than action. They are most commonly forms of the verb *to be*: is, am, are, was and were.)

For instance, how would you respond to this waiter?

"How does this veggie burger taste?"



"It tastes good."

or

"It tastes well."

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## Linking Verbs and Adjectives

It tastes good is the better construction. The adjective is used because taste is, in this sentence, a linking verb. Linking verbs do not directly express action but connect or link the subject to its description or identity. Linking verbs usually relate to a quality of being or one of the senses.



**Burger**



(link)

**tastes**



**good.**

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## Linking Verbs and Adjectives (continued)

Here are some more words that can act as linking verbs and take adjectives:

### Condition of being:

appear  
turn  
seem  
be  
become  
prove  
remain

The crowd became silent. ✓

The crowd became silently. ✗

The girl seems healthy. ✓

The girl seems healthily. ✗

### Condition of a sense:

look  
feel  
sound  
smell  
taste

The band sounds pleasant. ✓

The band sounds pleasantly. ✗



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## Adjectives or Adverbs

Many of the words on the previous screen are action verbs in some cases and linking verbs in others. The way to determine whether an adjective (linking verb) or adverb (action verb) should be used with the verb is to understand the meaning of the sentence.

**"The dog smells good."** In this sentence the dog has just taken a bath and now has a pleasant fragrance.  
(adjective/condition)

**"The dog smells well."** In this sentence the dog has a good sniffer, capable of smelling other things.  
(adverb/action)



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You have completed the first chapter of this course, Adjectives/Adverbs.

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## Modifiers

When you modify a car, you make changes to standard or original equipment in order to enhance the car's image or performance. Modifiers have a grammatical meaning as well. Any word, phrase, or clause that describes or changes the understanding of another part of the sentence is a modifier.



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## Dangling and Misplaced

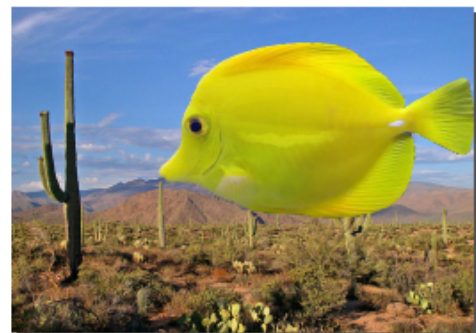
There are two common mistakes with modifiers: dangling and misplaced.

### Dangling



**"Dangling on a hook, I was ready to prepare supper."**

### Misplaced



**"My cousin misplaced my fish, who bought a cactus."**



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## Dangling and Misplaced (continued)

A misplaced modifier is improperly separated from the word(s) it modifies.

**My cousin misplaced my fish, who bought a cactus.**

In the above sentence, the phrase "who bought a cactus" is a misplaced modifier. Surely the speaker did not mean to say that the fish bought a cactus--the cousin did. A misplaced modifier can usually be corrected by moving it to a sensible place in the sentence (generally, next to the word(s) it modifies).

**My cousin, who bought a cactus, misplaced my fish.**



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## Misplaced Adjectives

That was an example of a phrase being misplaced. A single word, such as an adjective or adverb, can also be misplaced and distort the meaning of the sentence. Adjectives should follow the general rule that modifiers should be placed as close as possible to the word or word group they modify.

Consider the following sentences.

**Michelle ate a cold dish of cereal for breakfast.**

**Michelle ate a dish of cold cereal for breakfast.**



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## Misplaced Adjectives (continued)

Most people would enjoy eating cold cereal more than biting into a cold dish. This slip-up is so common in speech that it is barely noticeable. When you are writing, however, you should make sure the adjective is next to the noun it is meant to modify.



**"The only thing that soothes me more than a hot cup of coffee is a cup of hot coffee."**

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## Misplaced Adverbs

An adverb in the wrong spot also creates confusion. Consider the following sentences.

**We ate the lunch that we had brought slowly.**

What happened slowly: bringing the lunch or eating it? The adverb is probably meant to be placed next to "ate," as in: **We slowly ate the lunch we had brought.**

**We furiously caught the fish that tried to swim away.**

What was furious: catching the fish or its swimming? The adverb is probably meant to be placed next to the action of the fish, as in: **We caught the fish that furiously tried to swim away.**





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## Dangling Modifiers

Dangling modifiers require more effort than simply moving them to another location in the sentence. A modifier "dangles" when it hangs in a sentence without a direct relationship to the word(s) it is intended to modify.

**Looking toward the west, a funnel-shaped cloud stirred up dust.**

In this sentence what does the phrase looking toward the west modify? The cloud? The dust?



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## Dangling Modifiers (continued)

**Looking toward the west, a funnel-shaped cloud stirred up dust.**



The phrase is a dangling modifier because it does not directly modify anything. Neither the cloud nor the dust has eyes, so they are not looking to the west (or anywhere else). The thing that is looking toward the west is the observer or speaker of the sentence. However, because this person is not mentioned in the sentence, the introductory phrase dangles. The following is a possible revision.



**Looking toward the west, Fred saw a funnel-shaped cloud stirring up dust.**

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## Dangling Modifiers (continued)

**Dangling on a hook, I was ready to prepare supper.**

This sentence from the old fisherman a few screens back was our first example of a dangling modifier. Most dangling modifiers occur at the introduction of the sentence, and that is certainly the case here. Dangling on a hook shouldn't refer to the fisherman but the halibut that he just caught; however, the fish is not directly mentioned in the sentence. A good sentence will specify that the fish is dangling on a hook. The following is one possibility.

**I had the fish dangling on a hook and was ready to prepare supper.**

In this sentence the modifier is placed as close as possible to the word it modifies (fish).



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## Commas

The comma has many functions, including the power both to join related thoughts and to separate different thoughts. And with this great power comes great responsibility. A misplaced comma can distort the intended meaning of a sentence or confuse the reader.

The course Sentence Structure Part One covered the uses of a comma to form complete sentences. This section will examine the many other uses of the comma to ensure your writing is clear.



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## Commas (continued)

While there are some firm guidelines for the placement of commas, there are many other circumstances in which you must exercise your best judgment. In many cases the best way to understand the use of a comma is to read the sentence aloud. A comma acts as a pause, and wherever your speech pauses, you likely will need to add a comma to the script. Reading aloud can help you understand the first category of commas that we will cover: introductory phrases.



"If you listen carefully,  
you can hear the comma  
in my voice."



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## Introductory Phrases

When a word or phrase introduces a sentence, it is usually helpful to read the sentence aloud.

**If you are able to clean up then we would like to see you.**



**"If you are able to clean up <PAUSE> then we would like to see you."**



**If you are able to clean up, then we would like to see you.**

When the sentence is spoken (second example), there is a natural pause after the introductory clause, so a comma is inserted.

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## Introductory Phrases (continued)

Generally, very brief introductory phrases do not have a natural pause and do not require an offsetting comma. Phrases longer than three or four words usually take a comma. Here are some examples:

**In July your snowman will melt.**

**If you want to preserve it, you should use a deep freezer.**

**When you go to the store, ask for the biggest model.**



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## Introductory Phrases (continued)

Commas are often necessary to separate the introductory phrase from the remainder of the sentence in order to avoid confusion.

**While the dog ate the cat stayed away.**

Without a pause in the action, this sentence initially seems to suggest that the dog was eating the cat. Notice how the action changes when a comma is inserted after the introductory phrase.

**While the dog ate, the cat stayed away.**



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## Introductory Phrases (continued)

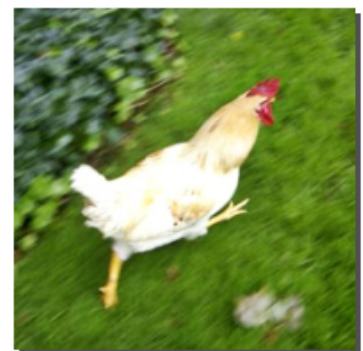
Here's another example in which inserting a comma after the introductory phrase alters the meaning of the sentence.

**Before eating the chicken ran away.**

Without any punctuation the sentence initially suggests that something else was about to eat a chicken but then ran away. The meaning is clearer in the following case.

**Before eating, the chicken ran away.**

Now we know with certainty that the chicken is not the meal; it is the subject that ran away before eating.





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## Commas in Lists

The second major category we will cover is the use of commas in lists. In a list of three or more items, you may or may not have been instructed in grammar school to insert a comma between the next-to-last item and the conjunction. Notice the difference in the two sentences below.

**The chimpanzee, the gorilla and the orangutan are not monkeys.**

**The chimpanzee, the gorilla, and the orangutan are not monkeys.**

Which sentence is better?



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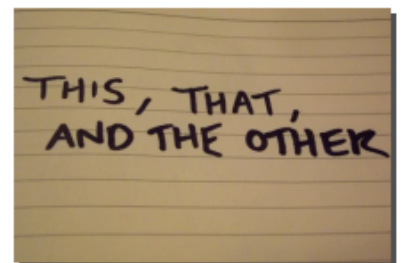
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## Commas in Lists (continued)

Actually, either construction is acceptable. The extra comma is, in most cases, optional. The key is to choose one method and use it consistently. While most periodicals and scholarly publications do not prefer to use the Oxford comma, you may wish to always use the extra punctuation. There are some cases in which the meaning of a sentence could be disturbed without the comma.

**I want you to meet my parents, Kathryn Thornton and James Lovell.**

Does that sentence need a comma?





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## Commas in Lists (continued)

Here is a visualization of the meaning of that sentence, with and without a comma.

**I want you to meet my parents, Kathryn Thornton and James Lovell.**

Meet my parents:



+



**I want you to meet my parents, Kathryn Thornton, and James Lovell.**

Meet:



+



+



So, unless your parents are Kathryn Thornton and James Lovell, you will want to keep the meaning of the sentence clear by using the extra comma.

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## Commas in Lists (continued)

The option to use the final comma in a series applies to most sentences that have a series of nouns, verb constructions, or phrases. When a series of adjectives modify a noun, the use of the comma is more cut and dried.

**Chuck wore a torn, wrinkled jacket.**

"Torn" and "wrinkled" are known as coordinate adjectives because they modify the same noun equally. When the adjectives are coordinate, they should be separated by a comma. Another test is to ask if "and" could be used between the adjectives. If so, then a comma should be inserted. The following sentences are identical.

**Chuck wore a torn, wrinkled jacket.**

**Chuck wore a torn and wrinkled jacket.**



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## Commas in Lists (continued)

When there is more than one adjective or modifier, commas are always used to separate the first items.

**The dark creepy mysterious and scary museum was accepting visitors.**

**The dark, creepy, mysterious, and scary museum was accepting visitors.**



"The docent was as unkempt, unclean, and untidy as the museum."

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## Dates

We have covered the uses of the comma in introductory phrases and series. In this third and last section, we will briefly examine many other uses of the comma that often result in punctuation errors.

In *international* or *military* dating, there are no commas used.

**22 December 1980.**

In *standard* U.S. formats, commas are used when the year and date are included but not used when one of the elements is missing.

**December 22, 1980, is my favorite date.**

**December 1980 was a good month.**

**Monday, December 22, 1980, was a good day.**





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## Quotations

When part of a sentence introduces quoted material, a comma is typically used.

**My father said, "Not everyone has what you have."**

**Daisy remarked, "I hate careless people."**

**Jay proclaimed, "Sure you can, old sport!"**



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## Quotations (continued)

One exception is that statements preceded by "that" or "whether" are not offset by commas.

**My father said that not everyone has what you have.**

**Daisy remarked that she hates careless people.**

**Jay proclaimed that Nick could do it.**

Also, quotations that are embedded in the meaning of the larger sentence are not offset by commas.

**My father said not everyone has "what you have."**

**Daisy remarked that she hates "careless" people.**

**Jay proclaimed that Nick could do it "with ease."**





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## Places

Separate cities from states or countries with a comma; postal codes, however, are not introduced by commas.

**Milan, Italy, has a wonderful Polish restaurant.**

**There is a restaurant near Winesburg, Ohio, that serves delicious mostaccioli and bad hot dogs.**

**The address is 1060 W Addison St., Chicago, IL 60613.**



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## Parenthetical Comments

A parenthetical comment is something added to the sentence that describes another element of the sentence. While a parenthetical phrase clarifies the meaning of the subject, removing it will not change the essence of the sentence.

**Jeff told his assistant, Brandt, to deliver the rug.**

In this sentence, "Brandt" is a parenthetical comment that describes "assistant." If there is only one person who is known as the assistant, then removing the appositive from the sentence does not disturb its meaning. In this example, "Brandt" is the appositive because it "renames or modifies" the word "assistant."



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## Parenthetical Comments (continued)

Jeff told his assistant, Brandt, to deliver the rug.

Jeff told his assistant to deliver the rug.

Because the parenthetical element is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it is offset by commas. In the sentences below, there is a slight pause as a parenthetical comment supports the understanding of the sentence. However, none of the phrases offset by commas are essential to the meaning of the sentence.

The other Jeff went bowling with Walter, his confidant.

He is, to say the least, a lazy man.

There was a dispute with the taxi driver, who is a fan of the Eagles.



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## Restrictive Phrases

Do not offset a restrictive phrase (one that is essential to the meaning of a sentence) by commas. Consider the following sentence.

People, who exercise daily, feel more energetic than sedentary people.

The above sentence is an example of an incorrect use of commas. The following does not contain the descriptive phrase.

People feel more energetic than sedentary people.

Therefore, the phrase is essential to the meaning of the sentence, and you should use no commas.

People who exercise daily feel more energetic than sedentary people.



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## Double Negatives

Every disciplined schoolchild knows that two wrongs don't make a right and two Wrights made an airplane. In grammar, two wrongs are called a double negative, which also is not all right. The following caption is an example of an unacceptable double negative.



**"Neither Orville nor Wilbur  
can't hardly ever keep their  
feet on the ground."**

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## Identifying Negatives

Some confusion about double negatives is due to the failure to correctly identify what words are negative. Most people will quickly recognize "no," "not," and "never" as negative words.

Russell will not never reveal the secret.

Russell will never reveal the secret.

Russell will not reveal the secret.

Mick cannot get no satisfaction.

Mick cannot get any satisfaction.

Mick gets no satisfaction.



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## Identifying Negatives (continued)

Other words are less obviously negative in construction.

hardly

barely

scarcely

neither

And it can be easy to forget that many contractions are also negative.

can't

don't

won't



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## Identifying Negatives (continued)

Be mindful of common negative words.

**I don't know nobody.**

**I don't know anybody.**

**Worrying won't hardly change anything.**

**Worrying won't change anything.**

**You haven't seen nothing yet.**

**You haven't seen anything yet.**



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## Acceptable Negatives

The presence of more than one negative word does not necessarily mean that the sentence is in error. The sentence below has two negative statements but is not a double negative.

**Pat will not return my phone calls nor reply to my email messages.**

In this sentence the acts of not returning phone calls and not replying to messages are discrete activities. This is not a double negative because the second negative is not expressed toward the same act.



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## Avoiding Confusion

Even when a sentence is technically correct in construction, the use of multiple negative terms can lead to confusion. Many sentences become clearer if negative statements are restated. Which of the following sentences is clearer to you.

**No language exists in which you cannot lie.**

**You can lie in any language.**

and

**I do not disagree with your statement.**

**I agree with your statement.**



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## Avoiding Confusion (continued)

**No language exists in which you cannot lie.** ❌

**You can lie in any language.** ✅

**I do not disagree with your statement.** ❌

**I agree with your statement.** ✅

Using multiple negative expressions can burden your audience by requiring a computation to determine your meaning. If the two phrases are identical, then your reader is more likely to understand and enjoy the affirmative statements.

Not + disagree = agree?





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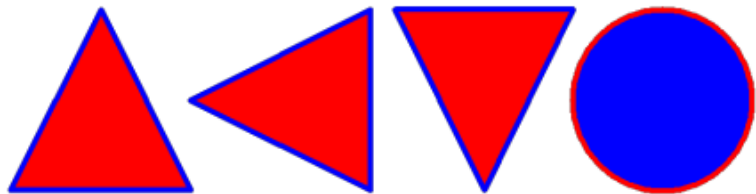
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## Parallel Construction

You've probably played a game similar to the "choose which does not belong" exercise below:

Which does  
not go with  
the others?



The answer, of course, is that the blue circle does not fit with the red triangles.

The first three objects are red and are triangles; this makes them similar. Demonstrating similarities is one aspect of parallelism.

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## Parallel Writing Examples

Parallelism applies to grammar as well. Your writing should express similar ideas in a parallel fashion. The following are some famous examples of parallel writing.

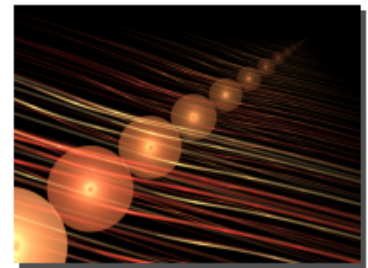
### Gettysburg Address

**"government of the people, by the people, for the people"**

### Great Expectations

**"A man with no hat and with no shoes and with an old rag tied around his head."**

Both these scripts are memorable because the parallel construction repeats similar words or phrases.



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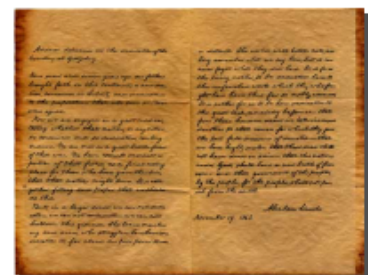
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## Parallel Writing Examples (continued)

How would the Gettysburg Address sound if parallel form was not used?

**"government of the people, by the citizens, and for the population"**

It's not quite the same. Writing that uses parallel form correctly not only expresses equal ideas in a like manner, but also helps the audience understand and retain the message.



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## Parallel Comparisons

Parallel structure should also be used when comparing two or more items. In short, the first part of the sentence should have similar format to the next.

**The requirements for owning a car are not as strict as owning a gun.**

This sentence does not have correct parallel form. Two things are being compared: the requirements for car ownership and owning a gun. The sentence would be better if requirements for both were compared.

**The requirements for owning a car are not as strict as the requirements for owning a gun.**

**The requirements for owning a car are not as strict as those for owning a gun.**



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## Parallel Comparisons (continued)

The following is another example of a comparison with faulty construction.

**Signing up for the Army is not as hard as the Navy.**

As the sentence is written, these are the items being compared:



Signing up for the Army

is not as hard as



the Navy (itself).



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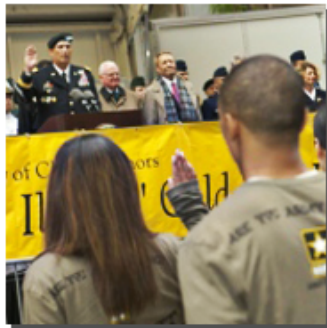
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## Parallel Comparisons (continued)

**Signing up for the Army is not as hard as the Navy.**

The writer is comparing the act of enlisting in the Army with the "hardness" of the entire U.S. Navy. More likely, the speaker wished to compare the process of enlisting in the Army with the process of enlisting in the Navy.

**Signing up for the Army is not as hard as signing up for the Navy.**



is not as hard as



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## Parallel Comparisons (continued)

Sometimes a faulty sentence can be corrected simply by moving one word. Examine the difference between these two sentences:

**Either you can join the Army or the Navy.**

**You can join either the Army or the Navy.**

The first sentence compares the act of joining the Army to another branch of military service. The second sentence has better parallel form because it compares to similar items: the Army and the Navy. All that has changed is "either" has been moved after the verb (join).



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